

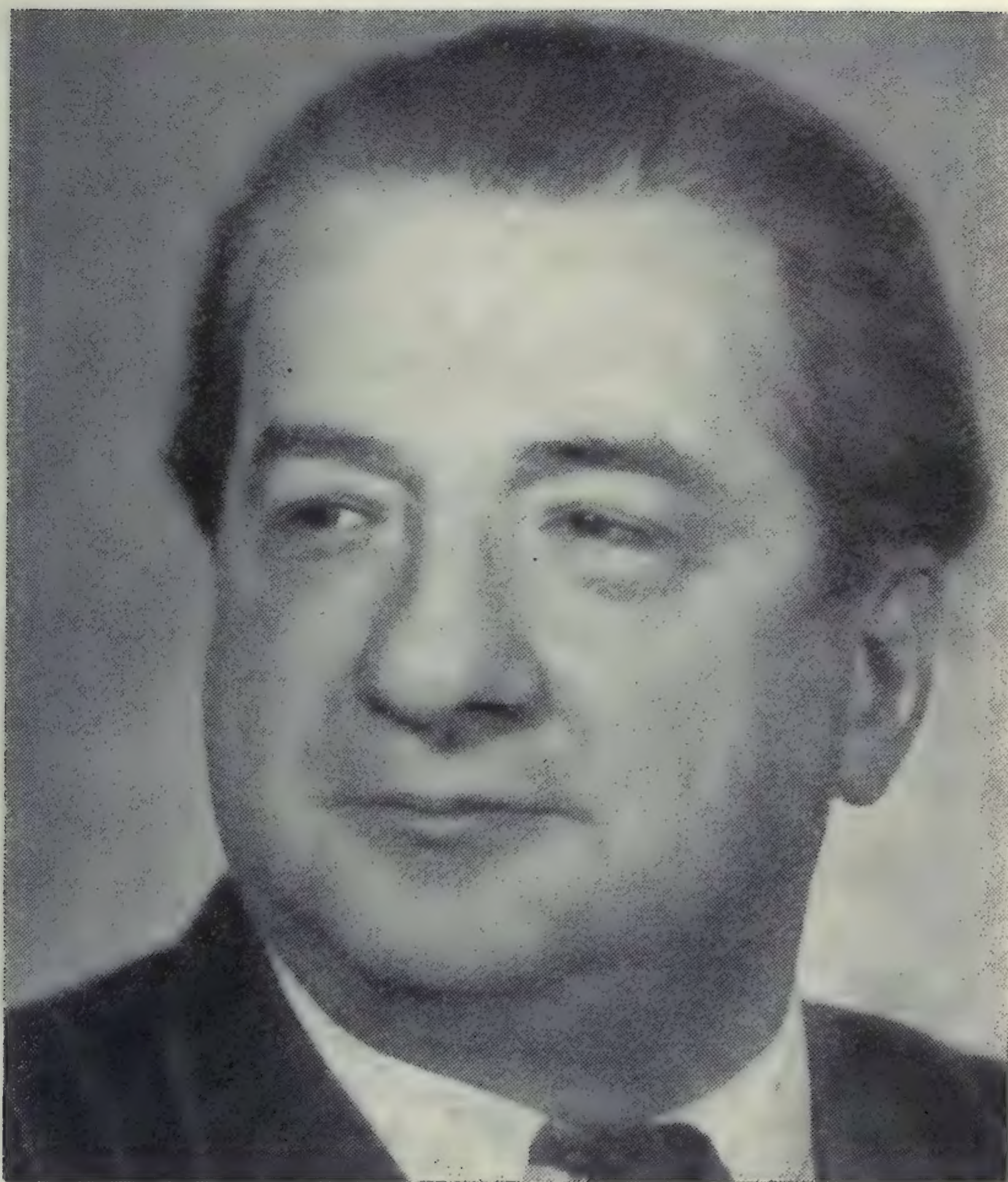
# Irakli Andronikov



ПОРТРЕТ

THE PORTRAIT





*IRAKLI ANDRONIKOV*  
(b. 1909)



*Irakli Andronikov is one of the creators of what may be called the "literary research" type of story, in which the quest for facts and documents of literary history carries us away in much the same manner as Jack London's good old tales of the quest for gold.*

*Andronikov is equally known as writer and actor, as historian and student of literature, as a talented story-teller and as the author of sensitive and highly original studies of the great Russian poets Pushkin and Lermontov. He is a born mime—a gifted poet and musician—and at the same time a keen and scholarly researcher in the field of the Russian classics.*



## THE PORTRAIT

### A FAMILIAR FACE

This is a story about an old, old painting, the portrait of a man you all know well, though he has long been dead. The story is not so old as the painting—in fact, it all came about quite recently; but it certainly is a story!

A trip to Leningrad, on business for one of our Moscow publishing houses, is no great event in itself. Nor would I start my story with it, had it not led to another event—no, not an event, a tiny incident, of the sort we generally forget almost before they are over—which proved the starting point for a long series of adventures.

And so, we begin with a business trip to Leningrad, a city that has a place all its own in the depths of my heart. I studied there, and took my University degree; made my first literary ventures, and gained my first friends—in a word, was happy.

It is wonderfully pleasant, such a brief return to a city in which you once lived ten happy years. And when that city is Leningrad—well, if you have ever been there, during the white nights particularly, you will understand me.

The straight lines of the embankments. The still ranks of the palaces—pale yellow, tarnished red, dull grey—and their reflections, upside down, in the mirror-black, granite-rimmed Neva. The arched tracery of the bridges against the yellow pink of the sky. The mauve outlines of towers, and columns, and bronze steeds, in the decep-





*Пушкинский дом на Тучковой набережной в Ленинграде.*

***The Academy of Sciences Pushkin Centre in Leningrad.***



tive half-light. The avenues and embankments seem even straighter, the bridges lighter and closer together, the domes and spires nearer one to another, in the strange, limpid hush. Everything seems smaller, somehow, than by daylight; but that makes the city only the more beautiful, the more entrancing—if Leningrad *can* be more beautiful!

But I have wandered from my subject.

Once in Leningrad, of course, I could not fail to look in at the Pushkin Centre.

Lermontov, his life and works—that is my passion, the object of years of study and research. And the Academy of Sciences Pushkin Centre in Leningrad is the repository of almost all of Lermontov's manuscripts. It owns a large collection of portraits of Lermontov, too, and of paintings and drawings by Lermontov's hand; and in a special room, in row upon row of bookcases, stand all the known editions of Lermontov, and also the works that have been written about him. A visit to the Centre is one of the high spots of every trip I make to Leningrad, however brief.

I once worked at the Centre myself, and still have free access to work-rooms and documents.

This time too, presenting myself to Yelena Panfilovna Naselenko, in the Museum Department, I received full permission to dig in catalogues, leaf inventory journals, and take from the shelves at will my choice of the heavy files and albums.

And I at once proceeded to make myself at home in the Department work-room—crowded with desks, bookcases, cabinets.

Ah, what a clumsy bear! Hardly had Yelena Panfilovna turned back to her work when, squeezing past her desk, I caught my sleeve on the corner of a huge open file. The file crashed to the floor, and almost all its contents came flying out. I remember picking up something like fifteen prints of Ushinsky, the noted educator; an engraving of the Metropolitan Yevgeny, compiler of a dictionary of Russian writers; several representations of Lomonosov,





*Лицо, о котором идет речь.*

*The portrait in question.*



with his head held high and a sheet of paper in his hand; Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, in a shaggy Caucasian cloak; a photograph of Tolstoi telling his grandchildren a story; the Krylov monument; the poet partisan Denis Davydov, on a white horse; a view of the south coast of the Crimea.

"I'm so sorry, Yelena Panfilovna," I mumbled. I was down on my knees, hastily stuffing the pictures back into the file. "How could I be so clumsy? Do forgive me!"

"Oh, well, I suppose I shall have to," she returned, smiling. "Hand it over."

But I did not hand her the file.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but might I look through this material just once more?"

"Of course. Only what could interest you in all that stuff?"

"One moment," I mumbled, digging among the pictures. "Just one moment."

Had my eyes been playing me tricks? No, no. I had seen it, and immediately lost it—such a familiar, such a very familiar face! It had flashed at me when the file was falling, and then disappeared.

"Just one moment. . . . One more moment. . . . Ah!"

Eagerly, I pulled it out: a small, yellowed photograph, the portrait of a young officer.

I had never before seen this portrait. Why, then, did it seem so familiar? The thoughtful eyes, dark and lustrous; the slightly upturned nose; the dark moustache, shading full, still childish lips; the stubborn chin; the eyebrows, raised high as though in wonder; the clear, smooth forehead—strictly speaking all these features might seem none too well assorted. Yet what a beautiful face it was! And what an unusual one!

For the rest—a heavy Army greatcoat, thrown carelessly over the shoulders, so that one of the epaulettes on the uniform beneath was visible.

I turned the photograph over. There was a pencilled note on the back:



"Epaulettes and trimmings—silver."

And that was all.

Who could it be?

It was he, of course. I had known him at once, as though we had long been acquainted, as though I had seen him thus in life. Lermontov! Was it really he? An unknown portrait?

Amazement—rapture—doubt. Lermontov? Lost in this heap of miscellaneous reproductions? Yet I was certain, I was positive that the face in the faded photograph was his—though, to tell the truth, it was not very like other portraits of him. In any case, I must find out.

"Yelena Panfilovna, is this by any chance Lermontov?"

"It's thought to be Lermontov," Yelena Panfilovna answered—and my breath came short. "But no one seems to know exactly."

I sat staring at the photograph. There could be no certainty, after all, who it might be—yet already the hundred years that part us from Lermontov seemed shorter, and he seemed to live, for me, on this yellowed bit of paper. How fascinating, the mystery of his face! How old had he been when the portrait was painted? What was the uniform he wore? How did it come to be here—this faded photograph, and where was the portrait it reproduced? And on what grounds, above all, was it thought to be Lermontov?

"Yelena Panfilovna, on what grounds is it thought to be Lermontov?"

"Well, you see," Yelena Panfilovna said, "the photograph came to us from the Lermontov Museum at the Cavalry School. That must have been in 1917. I suppose it was regarded there as a reproduction of a Lermontov portrait. If you believe it's really Lermontov, why don't you follow it up, and try to find the portrait? It's an interesting one."

Smiling, she pulled out a catalogue drawer and took up her pen.



The first thing to do, of course, was to find out exactly how the photograph had come to be in the Pushkin Centre, lying in that file of miscellanies on Yelena Panfilovna's desk.

In the MSS Department, I asked for the inventory books of the one-time Lermontov Museum at the St. Petersburg Cavalry School. As Yelena Panfilovna had said, this Museum's collection, and also its inventory books, had been transferred in 1917 to the Pushkin Centre.

After a little search I found the entry I was seeking. A photograph of a portrait of Lermontov had been donated to the Museum by one V. K. Vulfert, a judge of the Moscow Higher Court.

That told me who had owned the portrait. But *when* had he owned it, *when* given the Museum this photograph? Back in the eighties, perhaps, when the Museum was just being organized? How was I to trace him? Was he still alive? Still in Moscow? Still in possession of the portrait?

Yes, first and foremost, I must find out what I could about this Vulfert. For a beginning, I decided to look into Modzalevsky's card catalogue.

There is a miracle of bibliography for you!

Boris Lvovich Modzalevsky, well-known student of Pushkin's life and works, had the habit of noting down on a separate card or slip of paper every name that occurred in the materials he read—memoirs, works of history, old letters and albums, magazine articles, official reports. With the name, which he always wrote in full, he would set down the title of the book or magazine in which he had found it, noting volume and page. This habit he never gave up. And in the course of thirty years he accumulated over three hundred thousand cards. After his death, his catalogue was acquired by the Pushkin Centre. It is a little cabinet, with wide, shallow drawers. The





*Картотека Б. Л. Модзалевского.  
Над картотекой — его портрет.*

*Modzalevsky's card catalogue.*



drawers are divided into compartments, and each compartment is crammed with cards, all written in Modzalevsky's hand.

With the aid of this catalogue I soon had a list of several books in which the name of V. K. Vulfert might be found. Then, in the library, looking out these books and opening them at the pages indicated, I learned that Vulfert's name was Vladimir Karlovich; that his literary collection had included the manuscript of Gogol's *Marriage* and several letters written by the poet Batyushkov; that he had ventured into literature himself, writing several stories that were published in the eighties; that his father had been called Karl Antonovich; that his mother had been a sister of Nikolai Stankevich—a young thinker who had been a fellow-student of Lermontov's at Moscow University. From a book entitled *List of Civilian Officials*, I learned that Vladimir Karlovich Vulfert had been "in the service since 1866."

So! He could hardly be alive, then. I tried *All Moscow, 1907*—a Moscow address book. No Vladimir Karlovich. But there was another Vulfert—Ivan Karlovich, living at Molchanovka, 10. A brother, evidently. Well, he might be useful too.

I skipped a few years, and tried *All Moscow, 1913*. So far, so good. Ivan Karlovich was still listed, and there was also another Vulfert—Anatoly Vladimirovich, evidently a son of Vladimir Karlovich. His address was given as Bolshoi Nikolo-Peskovsky, 13.

Now I reached for *All Moscow, 1928*. I hardly dared open it. So much had been turned upside down between 1913 and 1928! Were the Vulferts alive? In Moscow? Was the portrait still in existence, and still in their hands? After all, they might very well have sold it.

Va.... Vu.... Vul.... Vulfert! Anatoly Vladimirovich. Vakhtangov Street, 13, flat No. 23.

Alive!

Alive in 1928. And now?



"I beg your pardon," I said to the librarian, "but might I see the latest telephone directory?"

"It's over on that shelf."

"That's the Leningrad directory. I want the Moscow one."

"We haven't got a Moscow one."

"Oh!"

I dashed out of the library and down the street to the nearest long-distance telephone station. Breathlessly, I requested a Moscow directory.

Vulfert, A. V. Vakhtangov Street, 13. Telephone, Arbat 1-08-87.

Hurrah!

#### AN ADMIRER OF THE RUST'HVELI THEATRE

My business in Leningrad completed, I returned to Moscow. And that same evening I set out in search of Vulfert, carrying in my brief case a copy of the photograph I had found at the Pushkin Centre.

I had not far to go. The house was only a block away from mine, and I saw its roof every time I looked out of my window. But all these years, I had never suspected the existence of an unknown Lermontov portrait under that roof.

How strangely things work out, at times!

I turned off Arbat into Vakhtangov Street. There it was—No. 13. I started up the stairs, watching the numbers on the doors. Flat No. 23. I knocked. An old woman opened the door. She seemed half asleep.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "Might I see Anatoly Vladimirovich Vulfert?"

"Vulfert? Why, the Vulferts moved out of here years ago!"

I stared at her blankly.

"Moved out? And where do they live now?"

"That I can't say."

"Is there no one who could tell me?"



"You'd best ask Sasha. That's their son. He's an army engineer. Go see him. He'll tell you."

"And where does he live?"

"Novinsky Boulevard. Number 23, I think it is. Down towards Vosstaniye Square. Only I don't remember what flat. Ask for Alexander Anatolyevich."

Off I sped to Novinsky Boulevard.

No. 23. And the flat was No. 17. A letter-box on the door, with the corner of a newspaper sticking out of it, *Sovetskoye Iskusstvo* (*Soviet Art*). Well, if art was honoured here, the portrait must be safe. Its value could not but be realized.

I rang the bell. Footsteps inside, and a man's voice asking:

"Who's there?"

"Might I see Alexander Anatolyevich?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon! Look, I'll undo the door, but don't come in for a minute. I've just climbed out of the bath."

The lock clicked open. Footsteps again, retreating rapidly. Then the same voice, from a distance, calling:

"Come in."

I had hardly shut the door behind me before I knew, by the very look of the place, that the portrait must be here.

Under the coat rack in the entry stood an old, round-topped, wooden travelling-trunk.

Through the glass doors of a bookcase I glimpsed the bindings of old books.

Over another bookcase hung an old painting—trees and a pond.

I was still looking about me when my host appeared: tall, slender, handsome, his shoulders the least bit stooped. He had a net on his wet hair.

"Oh!" he cried, when he saw me. "I beg your pardon! I didn't realize it was a stranger. By your voice, I took you for one of my old friends. I do apologize!"

"Oh, but it's I who should apologize, really."



"Well, let's get acquainted, in any case. My name is Vulfert."

"And mine is Andronikov."

"Very glad to meet you. Incidentally, I know a man of that name in Tbilisi."

"In Tbilisi? Probably some relative of mine."

"Then you're from Tbilisi too? In that case, you must know the Rust'hveli Theatre."

"I should think so! I was brought up on it, I might almost say."

"And you've seen Akaki Khorava on the stage?"

"Of course. And admire him tremendously."

"To my mind, he's an absolute genius! And then there's Vasadze, too, in the same theatre—another stupendous actor. Have you seen them together in *The Robbers*? I'm simply in love with their acting, I must confess."

And so the talk sped on—hurried, enthused, skipping from the Georgian theatre to the Maly, and then to the Moscow Art Theatre.

Alexander Anatolyevich was not merely a theatre-goer. He was a devotee. He had worked several years at the Colchis construction project, and all that time, during his frequent visits to Tbilisi, had never—if he could help it—missed an evening at the theatre.

Still talking, he ushered me into the living-room. I glanced around the walls. Several old engravings and water-colours. No sign of "my" portrait. And the conversation was so absorbing that I almost forgot what I had come for. At length, however, I recalled my errand, and slipped the photograph out of my brief case.

"I beg your pardon, Alexander Anatolyevich, but have you ever seen this portrait?"

I handed him the photograph.

"Why, it's our Lermontov!" he exclaimed. "Where on earth did you get hold of it?"

"Then it's really Lermontov!" I cried, exultant. "And still in your hands? And might I see it?"



"I never even asked what brought you to me, I was so busy talking about the theatre! But tell me, do—where did you get that photograph?"

I explained.

"How fascinating!" he exclaimed. "Well, your search is over now. The portrait is here somewhere. My grandfather treasured it so, he couldn't part with it even when he gave his library and manuscripts away to the History Museum. Would you like to see him? Here's his photograph. And this is my great-grandfather, and with him my great-grandmother, Nadezhda Vladimirovna. She was a sister of Nikolai Stankevich. Another sister was married to a son of Mikhail Semyonovich Shchepkin. My grandfather had a photograph of Shchepkin, only I don't know where it's got to."

Stankevich, renowned thinker; Shchepkin, renowned actor—an interesting background, truly.

"And now we'll have a look at Lermontov," Vulfert went on.

He glanced behind a bookcase. Peered up at the top of the bookcase. Opened the bookcase and searched inside it. Knelt, and looked under it. Groped in the space between his desk and the wall. Shifted the sofa. Went out into the entry and shifted the wooden travelling-trunk.

"It's very strange," he said at last. "The portrait is quite large, in a very good oval frame. It's painted in oils, and by a good artist, too. I simply can't imagine where it's got to. Mother must have put it away somewhere. I'll tell you what we'll do. Tatyana Alexandrovna—that's my mother—is away in the Crimea just now, but I'm expecting her home in a few days. When she arrives we'll search the portrait out, and then I'll let you know."

I left him my telephone number and went home, well pleased with this new acquaintanceship.



## "DON'T BE UPSET"

Two weeks passed. Finally, Vulfert telephoned.

"Don't be upset," he began, "but I must disappoint you about that portrait. I'm so sorry to have given you unfounded hopes. I really don't know how to tell you, but—well, unfortunately, the portrait has gone out of our hands, and I'm very much afraid it may have been destroyed."

I could not muster up the breath to say a word.

"When we were moving to these rooms from Nikolo-Peskovsky, five years ago," Vulfert went on, "my mother let the portrait slip away, and for a song. To some young fellow—Boris, everybody called him. At one time he worked for some old antiquarian who kept a shop on the Smolensky market-place. Mother saw him there several times; and then he came to the house, once or twice, to deliver some things she had bought. Well, and he took a fancy to the oval frame of the Lermontov portrait, and asked Mother to sell it to him, but she wouldn't. And when we were moving he came again, and he wouldn't take 'no.' He just had to have that frame. And Mother let him have it. But it was only afterwards she realized he'd taken the portrait too."

"What's this Boris's full name?" I asked.

"Mother doesn't know, unfortunately."

"Well, but what makes you think the portrait may have been destroyed?"

"Why, don't you see, this Boris evidently had no idea it was a portrait of Lermontov. Mother never said anything to him about it. And she hasn't seen him since. I'm terribly sorry things should have turned out so. If we get any new information, of course, I'll let you know."

Hanging up, I felt as though I had just learned of the death of a dear friend.

There were no traces, nothing to point the way for further search. The Smolensky market-place no longer existed.



The antique shop was gone. The old antiquarian who had run it—how was one to find him? This Boris who had bought the portrait—we did not even know his surname. And it was five whole years since the thing had happened. Five years ago, a person called Boris, in Moscow, had bought the portrait. That was all I knew. Far too little, alas, to justify any further effort.

But—if this Boris did not realize it was Lermontov he had bought, the portrait would never come to people's knowledge. All hope of that was vain. No, I must keep up the search, persistently, untiringly. No information? Then information must be obtained. And the first thing I must do was to find out every least detail the Vulferts could tell me about this anonymous Boris.

I went to visit them.

This time I found Tatyana Alexandrovna at home: elderly, but straight and tall, her hair still black, her clever grey-blue eyes alive.

"Yes, I know, I know," she cried, when I introduced myself. "My son told me all about it. 'Andronikov was here to see me,' he said, 'and such an interesting talk we had!' Well, and when he admitted that he'd started straight off on that theatre mania of his, I realized he'd probably talked you half-dead, and I was afraid you'd never come again. You must be disgusted with us, anyway, after the way we lost that portrait. I'm thoroughly upset about it. And in your place, I should simply go mad, I'm sure."

"Tell me," I said, "how did this Boris carry it off?"

"Easily enough," Tatyana Alexandrovna answered, smiling. "He simply took it under his arm and went off with it. It wasn't heavy. But how he came to be there, just at the critical moment, is more than I can understand. They'd unloaded the van, and the driver had to be paid, and Alexander had gone off somewhere with all our money in his pocket. I didn't know what to do. And just then this Boris came up. A tow-headed little fellow he is, restless and



fidgety. And he lisps. 'Thell me the frame,' he said. 'I'll give you fifty.' And I said, 'Here—take it, then, worse luck to you!' He paid me the money and took the frame. It was only afterwards I realized he'd taken the portrait too! Ah, well, don't be so glum. Have some coffee, and we'll try and think of some way out."

She was silent awhile, thinking back.

"Yes!" she recalled suddenly. "In 1935 this Boris worked in a Torgsin shop on Gorky Street. He was cashier in the sausage department. And generally, I saw him quite often, in one place or another. But since he took that portrait I've never had a sight of him. I suppose he's afraid of me. Well, but he can't be dead, after all! If I met him now, I'd send Alexander off for you at once, and we'd get that portrait back one way or another. Why don't you drink your coffee before it gets cold?"

As I listened I began to feel that, perhaps, all was not yet lost. Such was the soothing effect of Tatyana Alexandrovna's lilting Moscow speech, of her smiling apologies, of her cordial hospitality.

### ENCOUNTER IN A COMMISSION SHOP

Through acquaintances of acquaintances, I traced the whereabouts of the one-time director of the Torgsin shop on Gorky Street. He was still a director, but away out in Vladivostok. I wrote to him, asking the name of the man who had worked as cashier in the sausage department. I suppose he thought my question rather queer. At any rate, he did not answer.

Then I traced the assistant director, who had moved to Odessa. I wrote to him, too. And he, too, did not answer.

They must have thought I was mad!

I began a tour of Moscow's commission shops, asking the salespeople everywhere whether they did not know a lisping fellow named Boris.

"What's the rest of his name?" they would ask.



"That's just what I'm trying to find out."

"Well, you see, there are lots of people in Moscow named Boris."

I tried showing my photograph of the Lermontov portrait.

"Has a portrait like this ever passed through your hands?"

"No, never."

"If it should be brought here for sale, would you be so kind as to let me know? Here's my telephone number."

I looked in at the Literary Museum, too—showed my photograph, and asked to be informed if the portrait should be brought there.

I plagued all my friends for advice as to ways and means of seeking out Boris.

One day I looked in at the Vulferts' again. I found Tatyana Alexandrovna alone at home.

"How's life treating you, Tatyana Alexandrovna?"

"Ah, don't ask!"

"Why, what's wrong?"

"I've ruined everything."

"Ruined? What?"

"Your portrait!"

"How can you have ruined it?"

"Listen, then. I went into a commission shop, one day—the one in Stolesnikov Street. And the first thing I saw was Boris—that very same Boris! You should have heard me! 'Boris! Boris!'—and I ran straight to him. I made such a din, I was really ashamed. He turned around and stared at me. 'Don't you remember me?' I said. 'I'm Tatyana Alexandrovna Vulfert. I used to live on Nikolo-Peskovsky.' And he staring at me all the time, with those calf eyes of his. 'Yeth,' he said, 'I remember. I bought a nithe little frame from you.' 'Who cares about the frame!' I said. 'Bring me back that portrait! It's one of our ancestors. And it isn't mine. It belongs to my brother.' I said that



purposely. If I told him it was Lermontov, I thought, he'd never bring it back. 'My brother gives me no peace,' I said. 'He wants that portrait back.' Well, and then Boris said he'd sold the portrait to some artist or other, who stuck it away behind a bookcase. The frame went somewhere else. When I heard the portrait was unharmed, I started begging him to get it back for me. He laughed. 'If I bring you the portrait,' he said, 'will you tell me your miniatureth?' And I agreed. I was ready to make him a gift of the miniatures, if only he'd return the portrait. He promised to bring it the next day. I wrote down our new address for him, and—well, I've been waiting ever since. It's three weeks now, and not a sign of him."

"Did you find out his name?" I asked eagerly.

"That's just it—I didn't!"

"Oh! But why?"

"Well—I asked, of course, but he only said, 'Is it my name your brother wants, or the portrait? I'll bring you it tomorrow, never fear.' Ah, don't you be so glum! The main thing is, the portrait still exists. And if I ever catch that Boris again, I'll simply force his name out of him. I'll call a militiaman—that's what I'll do. There's one thing that worries me, though—I'm afraid that artist, whoever he is, might take it into his head to scrape the paint off. Because, you see, some people think they can see something else underneath. One artist friend of ours kept begging me to let him scrape it a bit, the tiniest bit, just to see what there was underneath."

"But I don't understand," I cried, alarmed. "What could there be but the canvas?"

"That's just what I told him. 'It must be the soul,' I said, 'that you spy through the paint.' I don't know what he thought he might find, but in any case, I wouldn't let him touch it."

"Of course not," I said—as though I were an authority. "We'll look into that, if ever we find the portrait. The main thing is, to find it! The rest will be simple."



## NIKOLAI PAVLOVICH

The days rolled by. No portrait. No Boris. No idea as to the address or identity of the artist who had thrust the portrait behind his bookcase.

"Found it yet?" my friends kept asking.

"No, not yet."

"You're certainly taking your time about it! The portrait's probably been sold again long since. As if anyone would keep Lermontov behind a bookcase!"

"Well, but the man doesn't know it's Lermontov," I would explain.

"Oh," my friends would say, disappointedly. "Well, in that case, you're hardly likely to find it."

Piqued, I would say to myself, "I'll show them yet!"

But I had nothing to show.

One day I decided to talk the thing over with Pakhomov. With Nikolai Pavlovich, I mean.

Nikolai Pavlovich Pakhomov was known in the Moscow museum world as an authority on rare books, antiques, old paintings.

"Has Nikolai Pavlovich seen it?" "What does Nikolai Pavlovich think of it?"—those were questions often to be heard among researchers.

And as to Lermontov—there was no one who could tell you more than Nikolai Pavlovich about Lermontov's portraits, drawings by Lermontov, illustrations to Lermontov's works, museum materials of any type connected in any way with Lermontov. This was a field in which Nikolai Pavlovich knew no equal. Moreover, he was working at the time on a book to be called *Lermontov in the Fine Arts*.

Yes, I decided, I would have a talk with him: surprise him, first, with my new portrait, and then ask his advice.

I telephoned, and the next evening went to see him.

We sat long over our tea, fiddling with our spoons and discussing Lermontoviana.





*«Вульффертовский» портрет.*

***The Vulfert portrait***



At a favourable moment, I slipped a hand into my briefcase and got out my precious photograph.

"Nikolai Pavlovich," I asked, as indifferently as I could, "what would you say of this?"

And I held the photograph up so that Nikolai Pavlovich could see it. I could not help smiling. I sat waiting for his answer.

"Just one minute, my dear fellow," Nikolai Pavlovich said. "I can't seem to make it out without my glasses."

He reached over to his desk.

"Is it by any chance *this* portrait you have in mind?"

And he showed me a photograph, exactly the same as mine.

I stared at it, trying to detect some difference—any difference! There was no difference. Absolutely none. The silver epaulette, half concealed by the greatcoat collar; the eyebrows, raised as though in surprise; the eyes, absorbed and serious; the nose, the lips, the hair; even the size of the photograph—all exactly the same!

For an instant I was stunned, as by a sudden shot. And then, for a minute, the whole story—the portrait, and Boris, and my rounds of the commission shops, and my talks in the museums—all seemed to me so stale, so tame, so needless, like some half-forgotten dream.

There was a silence. Finally, I cleared my throat.

"Interesting!" I said. "They're exactly alike!"

Nikolai Pavlovich put away his photograph and smiled.

"M'm," was his only remark.

We applied ourselves to our tea.

"Where did you get it?" Nikolai Pavlovich asked, after a while.

"Pushkin Centre. And you?"

"History Museum."

"Is that where the original is?"

"No, only a photograph. The original belonged to the Vulferts."



He knew all about it! What a fool I had made of myself!

We returned to our tea in silence. At length, I mustered up the spirit to ask:

"Well, Nikolai Pavlovich, and what do you think of it? An interesting portrait, to my mind."

"Yes," he said. "It's interesting. But the question is—who is it?"

"Who? Why, Lermontov, obviously!"

"I beg your pardon, but where did you get that information?"

"I didn't get it anywhere," I said. "I simply draw conclusions from the facts at my disposal. For one thing, this young officer is remarkably like Lermontov's mother. You will remember, of course, his friend Krayevsky's remark to the effect that Lermontov resembled his mother's portrait more than he did any of his own. Viskovatov cites him, if you remember, in his biography of Lermontov: "He resembled his mother," Krayevsky declared, and turning to her portrait, added, "If you add a moustache to this face, and change the hairdress, and throw a dolman over the shoulders—you'll find yourself looking at Lermontov." Well, and, Nikolai Pavlovich, you may believe it or not, but I've done all that—added the moustache to Lermontov's mother's face, and thrown the dolman over her shoulders. And the resemblance to the Vulfert portrait is simply amazing. Too amazing for any explanation but one: that the person in the portrait is the poet Lermontov, her only son."

"Go on," Nikolai Pavlovich said.

"For another thing," I continued, "Vulfert clearly had grounds for considering it a portrait of Lermontov. Why should he have kept it, and given photographs of it to different museums, if he didn't think it genuine? Well, and finally, Lermontov seems to be wearing the uniform of the Grodno Hussars. The silver epaulette speaks for that. Gilt epaulettes were worn in all the other regiments Lermontov-





Портрет матери поэта — Марии  
Михайловны Лермонтовой.

*Portrait of the poet's mother, Maria Mikhailovna Lermontova.*



tov served in—the Guard Hussars, the Nizhny Novgorod Dragoons, the Tenginka Infantry.”

“Are you done?” Nikolai Pavlovich asked, as I paused. “Then, with your permission, there are a few things I should like to say. First of all, I see no resemblance in this officer to Lermontov’s mother. Forgive my bluntness, but that argument is rather weak. To you, he seems to resemble her. To me, he doesn’t. To some third person, he may seem to resemble you or me. Seeming is no argument. I prefer concrete proofs.”

He was right, too, I reflected. It was really no argument.

“And now as to Vulfert’s considering it Lermontov,” Nikolai Pavlovich continued. “Here—look at these! Their owners also claimed they were portraits of Lermontov.”

He handed me two photographs. One was a portrait of an obvious cretin—narrow shoulders, low forehead, apathetic look. The other portrayed a goggle-eyed person with a huge, bushy moustache. He had his head drawn down between his shoulders. With an expression of horrible distaste, he was smoking a long-stemmed Turkish pipe. How outrageous to admit even the slightest possibility that these might be Lermontov!

And again I had to confess to myself that Nikolai Pavlovich was right. Vulfert’s claim was no proof.

“Well, and as to the uniform,” Nikolai Pavlovich went on mercilessly, “that’s hard to tell by a photograph, of course; but surely you know that the Grodno Hussars were not the only regiment that wore silver epaulettes. There were several others. So that I, for one, would avoid drawing conclusions from such uncertain data. And anyway, my dear friend, to be very honest”—and he smiled at me—“can you tell me, with your hand on your heart, that you really think this portrait is Lermontov? Why, compare it with any of the authentic portraits. Can you find the slightest likeness?”

“Yes, I can and do.”



“But where? In what?” he insisted, clearly perplexed by my obstinacy. “Where are your proofs?”

I did not answer. I had no proofs.

#### WHEN YOU GET DOWN TO IT

I went home that night deeply depressed.

Could I really be mistaken? Was it really not Lermontov? Impossible! Ah, what a waste of time and effort, if it was not he! What an awful shame!

And I could see it all so clearly! Early spring, 1838. Lermontov—looking just as in this portrait—comes to spend a few days in St. Petersburg. His service in the Grodno Regiment, now quartered outside Novgorod, is almost over. His grandmother is interceding for him, through persons who have influence at Court. Any day now, the transfer may come through—back to Tsarskoye Selo, to the Guard Hussars. And, before discarding the Grodno uniform, he yields to his grandmother’s pleas and sits for his portrait.

So far as one might judge by a photograph, the portrait was a very good one. Grandmother must have asked an artist of some standing.

And so, for a few days, Lermontov finds himself once more in the city whence a year earlier, for his stanzas on the death of Pushkin, he was exiled to military service in the Caucasus. He has matured, in this year. His travels through the Caucasus, his encounters in Cossack villages, in seacoast towns, at the mineral springs, along the Caucasian roads, have filled his soul to overflowing with new impressions—have given birth to new and daring projects. He sees more clearly and more deeply, now, the vicious and empty vanity that reigns in “high society”—the fetters it hangs on human feeling, the waste of talents, strangled by lack of any worthy goal. The thought has come to him already of a novel in which he will set forth these impressions, a novel expressing the tragedy of an intel-



ligent and gifted man of his day—the hero of his times.

Surely, all this was clearly to be read in Lermontov's eyes, in the Vulfert portrait!

I could see Lermontov—as he is depicted in this portrait—walking home, as dawn approaches, through the streets of the city. There he goes along the Palace Embankment, past the sleeping palaces—pale yellow, tarnished red, dull grey. The waves are beating against the boat landings. The floating bridge by the Summer Gardens sways and creaks. A sentry, with his halberd, stands dozing beside his striped booth. The poet's footsteps echo up and down the deserted embankments. The city seems to have melted away in the grey murk that precedes the dawn; and there is a sense of something lurking somewhere in the chill dampness of this early hour.

Yes, and I could see Lermontov—just as in this faded photograph, with his greatcoat thrown carelessly over his shoulders—leaning back in an armchair in his grandmother's rooms on the Fontanka, looking out through the window at the iron grille that lines the embankment, and the trees—still black and bare—along the grim walls of the Mikhailovsky castle. I could see the whole scene: a low couch by the armchair, heaped with cushions, and Lermontov's sabre thrown across it; and a round table, piled with books and papers. The light from the window falls on Lermontov's face, on the beaver collar of his coat, on the silver epaulette. And there—with his back to me—stands the artist, in a coffee-coloured frock-coat. Before the artist stands an easel, and on the easel a portrait—this very portrait.

No, I could not, I could not possibly persuade myself that it was not Lermontov! I could never reconcile myself to such a thought!

Why was it that Nikolai Pavlovich and I differed so radically in our opinions of this portrait? Probably, because our ideas of Lermontov himself did not agree. Nor was there anything surprising in that. Even the people who





*Петербург 1830-х годов. Цепной мост на Фонтанке. Третий слева направо — дом Венецкой, в котором Лермонтов останавливался в 1838 году.*

*St. Petersburg in the 1830s. The third from left to right is the house where Lermontov lived in 1838.*



had known Lermontov in life had differed in their thoughts of him. Those who shared his wanderings, who fought by his side on the field of battle, had described him as a devoted comrade, youthfully ardent, tactful as a woman in his relations with his friends. But there had been others, many others, who found him arrogant, rude, malicious, mocking; who measured him by their own small standards—blind to the poet, discerning only the officer.

Why, then, must I agree with Nikolai Pavlovich? Had he proved to me that the man in the portrait was not Lermontov? That it was someone, anyone, else? Of course not! He had simply refuted my own arguments, and most logically, demonstrating their lack of substance. He simply considered, and quite justly, that in itself the photograph gave me no real grounds for proclaiming it Lermontov. But if I could find such grounds, he would be compelled to agree with me.

Yes, I must find that portrait, whatever happened. And then we would see!

#### A LERMONTOV DISPLAY AT THE LITERARY MUSEUM

I had a call, one day, from the Literary Museum—an invitation to attend the opening of a special Lermontov display. Vladimir Dmitriyevich Bonch-Bruyevich, the Museum director, was particularly anxious to have me come. There would be some writers I knew, and some people from the films, and several newspapermen.

Later, Nikolai Pavlovich phoned and also asked me to come. There was some interesting material he and Mikhail Dmitriyevich Belayev had dug up in various places: several unknown drawings and a book with an inscription in Lermontov's hand.

I was detained, and people were already beginning to leave when I reached the Museum. I met several acquaintances at the checkroom. Bonch-Bruyevich was on the stairs leading up from the entrance—greeting one visitor,





*Государственный литературный музей в Москве.*

*State Literary Museum in Moscow.*



seeing off another, thanking a third, reminding a fourth of some promise, promising something to a fifth himself, asking everyone to come again.

"So you're here, after all," he rumbled at me. "Good! You must be sure and see everything!"

Then Nikolai Pavlovich came up, with a smiling "Latish, my friend!"—and led me off to show me the exhibits.

There were several late-comers in the first hall, looking at portraits, paintings, sculptures.

"You can see these later," Nikolai Pavlovich said. "I'd rather you started further on."

And he led me straight through to the second hall.

"We've got some rather decent stuff together," he said. "Look at this water-colour. Interesting, isn't it? Gau, of course. A portrait of Mongo Stolypin. We found it in the store-rooms at the Tretyakov Gallery."

I moved about the hall, from exhibit to exhibit. Soon Bonch-Bruyevich came up, with Belayev.

"Well?" he asked.

"Splendid!" I answered, looking up at him.

And then I noticed the wall behind him—and stood petrified.

"Oh!" was all that I could say.

I was looking straight at the Vulfert portrait, hung in a simple oval frame. The original. In oils. With the same silver epaulette as in the photograph, half concealed by the beaver collar of his greatcoat. Lermontov, with that look of melancholy contemplation in his eyes.

"Why don't you faint?" Nikolai Pavlovich cried, his eyes screwed up in friendly laughter; and he held out his arms, as if to support me.

I did not speak. I could feel the colour flooding my cheeks. Deeply moved, I looked into the face that had occupied my thoughts so long, so hopelessly. My mind was in a whirl. I was almost happy—but only almost. A secret vexation marred the joy of discovery. Of what good had



been all my efforts, my anxieties, my anticipations? What had anyone gained by them? Nothing! Others had found the portrait, not I!

"Well, man, won't you even say a word?" Belayev demanded.

"He's tongue-tied with joy," Nikolai Pavlovich said, smiling.

"Let him look his fill," Bonch-Bruyevich put in. "It was his doing we bought the portrait, after all."

"My doing?" I asked, my spirits rising.

But Nikolai Pavlovich waved my inquiries away.

"We'll talk of that later," he said impatiently. "I want to know what you think of the portrait."

"To my mind, it's excellent."

"Yes, it isn't bad," Nikolai Pavlovich agreed. "Only, you see, it isn't Lermontov. That's settled definitely now."

"Not Lermontov? Who is it, then?"

"Some unknown officer."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Why, his uniform."

"What about his uniform?"

"It proves he's an officer of the Engineers—that's what! Look for yourself: the edging on the collar of his coat is red. And the combination of red edging and silver epaulettes, for that period, means the Engineers. You can't go against that."

"In other words...."

"In other words, it's clearly not Lermontov."

"Then why have you hung it here?"

"Why—for one thing, to show it to you, and get your opinion. Let it hang, for the time being. It's in nobody's way."

"Well, but still, Nikolai Pavlovich," I protested, "it can't be settled so simply as all that."

But Nikolai Pavlovich shook his head.

"I'm afraid that's that," he said.





Уголок лермонтовской выставки в Литературном музее. В овальной  
раме— «вульффертовский» портрет.

*Lermontov exhibition at the Literary Museum.*



## THE SLOYEVS

The portrait had only been acquired a few days before the opening of the display.

An old woman came to the Museum offices to offer four old engravings and a rolled-up canvas. The canvas, when unrolled, proved to be a portrait of a young officer. She asked a hundred and fifty rubles for it.

The purchasing committee decided to take the engravings, but found nothing to interest it in a portrait of some unknown officer. When the old woman came for her answer the portrait was returned to her, with the explanation that it did not suit the Museum's needs.

But just as she was about to roll it up again Mikhail Dmitriyevich Belayev happened into the room. He noticed the portrait, and exclaimed that it was the very one Andronikov was searching for—the one he had asked the Museum to look out for. Andronikov, he added, considered it a portrait of Lermontov; but Nikolai Pavlovich Pakhomov was of quite a different mind on the matter. Nikolai Pavlovich, who had come in during this explanation, insisted that the portrait be bought. And Bonch-Bruyevich directed the committee to take it. It was entered in the Museum's inventory books as No. 13931.

"What was the old woman's name?" I asked.

"Yelizaveta Kharitonovna Sloyeva."

"And her address?"

"It's here in Moscow. Eleven, Tikhvinsky Street."

I went straight to Tikhvinsky Street.

"Might I speak to Yelizaveta Kharitonovna Sloyeva?"

"That's me."

"I believe you sold a portrait recently to the Literary Museum."

"Why, yes, I did."

"Might I ask where you got it?"

"My son gave it to me."



"And where is your son?"

"In the next room, shaving."

In the next room:

"I beg your pardon, Comrade Sloyev. Could you tell me where you got that portrait?"

"My brother brought it. He'll be here in a minute. Ah, there he is! Kolya, tell the comrade where you got that portrait."

And Kolya Sloyev, a young railway-school student, outlined for me the portrait's recent history.

"They were taking down a woodshed, out in our back yard. And among the junk there was a broken-down bookcase and this old portrait. I was coming through the yard, and I noticed a bunch of youngsters playing. They were tying a rope to the portrait, and they had a muddy cat they were going to ride on it. I told them they ought to be ashamed of themselves, treating a portrait that way—like so many savages! I took it away from them, and thought I'd leave it on one of the window-sills on our staircase. But my brother here came along just then, and he said that was no place. There's a radiator under the window, and the heat would crack the paint and wrinkle the canvas. So I took the thing home, and my brother mended the canvas where the youngsters had torn it, and gave it a rubbing with some oil. And we hung it on the wall. And then, one day, Mother said, 'It seems to be such a good piece of work. Suppose I took it to a museum?' And so she did."

"Who owned the bookcase that was in that woodshed?" I asked.

"An artist. Voronov, his name was."

"And where could one find him?"

"He's dead. Died two years ago, and his bookcase and that portrait were dumped in the shed."

Everything tallied. And so, all these years, the portrait had been lying here in Tikhvinsky street, behind the bookcase of an artist named Voronov.



## WHAT THE TRETYAKOV GALLERY REPLIED

Nikolai Pavlovich Pakhomov's book came out. It included a reproduction of the Vulfert portrait, which it classified as doubtful.

"The officer in this portrait," Pakhomov wrote on page 69, "bears very little resemblance to Lermontov. Only in his nose and forehead can one trace the slightest likeness."

I put the book down and sank once more into thought.

At the beginning it had seemed to me that the main thing was to find the portrait. Well, now it was found, and safely stored at the Museum. Yet the basic problem had not been solved, and probably never would be solved. Though I was convinced, as before, that this officer was Lermontov, I had no way of proving it. Through the years, the decades, the portrait would remain hidden away in some dark store-room at the Museum, and the poet's charmed readers would never see him as he was here portrayed. Ah, that uniform! It seemed destined for ever to hide the poet from those who loved him. Yes, there was no getting rid of that uniform.

Ah, but was there not? Might it not be attempted? Had not Tatyana Alexandrovna Vulfert spoken of something that showed through from underneath? If the portrait had ever been retouched—who could tell whether the present coat had not been painted over another coat, with other edging on its collar?

I went to the Literary Museum, straight to the department of iconography.

"Might I see the Vulfert portrait of Lermontov?" I asked. "The one that was hung at the display."

"Which portrait did you say?"

"The Vulfert one. That used to belong to the Vulferts."

"We have no such portrait."

"Well, the Sloyev one, perhaps, you call it. It was bought from Sloyeva."



"Never heard of it."

At this point one of the girls in the department had an inspiration.

"He must mean the Andronikov portrait," she said. "The one that isn't genuine."

I actually blushed.

They got me out the portrait. Once more I saw that remarkable face—so open, so noble, so marked with intellect.

I took it to the window. Yes, there really did seem to be something underneath—under one of the silver buttons of the greatcoat, and under the collar.

I asked for a magnifying glass, and looked through that. Yes, there certainly seemed to be something underneath. You could glimpse it where the paint was cracked, in the green cloth of the greatcoat. As though both coat and greatcoat had been painted over something else.

And suppose—just suppose!—that something else was the uniform of one of the regiments in which Lermontov had served: the Nizhny Novgorod, the Tenginka, the Grodno!

That could be determined by X-rays. It had been X-rays, I knew, that had helped Korin in his discovery of the renowned Fornarina, a painting by Giulio Romano, pupil of Raphael. The rays had revealed the figure beneath a layer of clothing added at a later period; and, removing this surface layer, Korin had brought to light the long-lost painting.

"Could we have this portrait X-rayed?" I asked.

"Why not?" the Museum staff replied. "We can send it to the Tretyakov Gallery. They'll do it for us."

The portrait was sent to the Tretyakov Gallery. In my impatience, I inquired at the Museum daily for the result.

At length the portrait was returned, and with it a letter, stating, in brief: Nothing discovered beneath the surface. The letter was signed by Professor Toropov.



## THE LABORATORY ON FRUNZE STREET

Besides X-rays, there are ultra-violet rays, which, falling on an object, make it emit light—the character of the light depending on the nature of the object. Luminescence, this phenomenon is called.

Suppose that some inscription on a document has been removed by chemicals. It cannot be seen by ordinary light. It will not show on a photograph. It cannot be detected by X-rays. Ultra-violet rays will find it, and make it legible.

Ultra-violet rays discover blood-spots that have been scrubbed or laundered out. They will discover oil, if it is there, in rock. They are unbiased judges of precious stones, and of sorts of wood. They can determine the composition of lubricants, of paints, of inks. If you dip your pen in different ink-wells while writing a letter, they will discover the difference—even if the ink is of one and the same colour. They are used at fish canneries to distinguish spoiled fish from fresh.

If the uniform in the Vulfert portrait had been painted over another uniform, at a different time, the paint then used might luminesce differently, when subjected to ultra-violet rays, than the original paints.

It was Tatyana Alexeyevna Turgeneva, a grand-niece of Turgenev and a member of the Literary Museum staff, who suggested these rays to me.

“Have you never thought of trying the Criminal Laboratory?” she asked me one day, when I looked in at the Museum. “It’s a wonderful place, run by the Law Institute of the Academy of Sciences. And it’s right in your district—10, Frunze Street. Of course, their regular job is to investigate clues and evidence. But they help us too. I took a book there only the other day, with a blacked-out inscription that was thought to be in Lomonosov’s hand. No one could make it out. X-rays did no good. But the Criminal Laboratory photographed the inscription in



ultra-violet rays, and the photograph was perfectly legible. It wasn't Lomonosov, either. I was there while they did it, and—well, it was simply miraculous! Everything showed so clearly!"

Tatyana Alexeyevna and I took the portrait to Frunze Street that very day.

When we unrolled the canvas at the Laboratory and explained our errand, everyone was tremendously interested. They bent over the portrait, looking eagerly into the face, and asked endless questions about it. That is easily understood. Loving the poet's works, people want to know what he himself was like, and every detail interests them deeply. A new portrait of Lermontov—who would not be glad to help in its identification?

They placed the portrait on a table, under an appliance that looked much like the quartz lamps I had seen in hospitals. But this was a lamp of a special type. Its light filters passed only ultra-violet rays.

Heavy hangings were drawn over the windows, and then the current was turned on. The portrait began to glow, emitting a sort of violet haze. Shades and colours vanished, and in place of a work of art I found myself staring at a crude smear. Every fault, every unevenness in the priming stood out sharply. Tiny cracks and scratches, unnoticeable ordinarily—the scar left by a nail—the tear that Sloyev had mended—everything became clearly visible.

"A little better than X-rays, this," Tatyana Alexeyevna whispered.

"Yes, I see," I answered.

"Do you notice those streaks under the greatcoat?"

"Yes."

"And—you know—something seems to show through under the coat!"

"I don't see anything."

"You're simply blind! Don't you really see it? Just below the collar. Definitely!"



"There's nothing there at all."

"How can you be so hateful! Don't you really see another coat underneath?"

"I'm very sorry, but I don't."

"Nor do I, any more," Tatyana Alexeyevna admitted, sighing.

The Laboratory staff examined every inch of the canvas, turning it at all angles to the rays.

"We're sorry," they told us finally, "but we can find no changes worth speaking of. No inscriptions of any kind on the canvas. No second uniform underneath. Nothing but a few slight brush corrections."

"Yes, there's nothing there," Tatyana Alexeyevna agreed, and added, for my benefit: "I told you everything would show as clear as clear! These rays are wonderful!"

The Laboratory people laughed.

"We can try infra-red," they offered.

#### AN ARTIST'S EYE

By means of infra-red rays, a letter written in lead pencil can be read through a sealed envelope. That is because, to these rays, paper is a semi-transparent medium, and pencil lead an impassable barrier. A printed document blotted with blood or ink can be easily read in infra-red rays, for they penetrate blood and ordinary ink, but are stopped by printer's ink. Infra-red rays will detect every attempt at forgery, erasure, or correction, however skilful, on cheques, bonds, or other papers.

If there were constituents impenetrable to infra-red rays in the paints used for the portrait, the secret of the uniform would be revealed.

The portrait was photographed in infra-red rays, from front and back. But nothing invisible came to light.

Failure! Yet I could think of no other way of proving the portrait's identity than the discovery of another uniform beneath the present one.



No, I thought, rays might be all that was said of them, but after all it was art we were dealing with, and the best judge would be an artist. Why not ask Korin? He was an artist of wonderful taste and talent, and his eye was keen. Surely he might help!

I telephoned Korin and asked him to meet me at the Literary Museum.

He came. I led him straight to the portrait.

"I want your opinion, Pavel Dmitriyevich," I began. "Is there any indication of another uniform underneath this one? X-rays don't show any, nor do ultra-violet rays, or infra-red."

"Why does that interest you?" Korin asked, in his slow, quiet way.

"I'm trying to identify the portrait."

"Why, that's simple enough, I should say. It's Lermontov, clearly."

"How do you know?"

"By his face, of course. Who else do you think it could be?"

"No one but Lermontov."

"Well, then, why all the to-do?"

"The trouble is, I have no proofs."

"No proofs? The face is there for all to see. What better proof could anyone ask?"

"But that's not documentary proof."

"Well, you don't ask your acquaintances for their documents before you say 'Hullo,' do you?" Korin demanded, laughing. "You know them without documentary proof, I'm sure!"

"Yes, but, Pavel Dmitriyevich, looks are a debatable thing. There are people who don't agree with your opinion and mine. They say there's no resemblance here to Lermontov."

"How can anyone say that?" Korin cried, clearly astonished. "The outline, the features, the proportions—clearly, it's Lermontov. Painted from life. In excellent style. In



the eighteen thirties. By a skilled artist unquestionably. But what makes you ask about another uniform?"

"This one is wrong."

"Oh, so that's it! I see. But there's no sign of interference, unfortunately. Nothing but a few slight changes down below, by the original artist. It will do you no good to remove the paint. You'll only ruin the portrait."

"What do you advise, then?"

"Try to find some other way of proof. I'm sure there must be some way. Base yourself on the face, on the resemblance. To my mind, it's unquestionable."

### AN UNUSUAL HOBBY

In my Leningrad days, working at the Pushkin Centre, I had made friends with a young professor of history, keen, gifted, erudite—Pavel Pavlovich Shchegolev.

Pavel Pavlovich was gone now, to my deep sorrow. He had died in 1936.

At his home, while he was still alive, I had often met his friend, Yakov Ivanovich Davidovich, professor of law at Leningrad University, a well-known authority on questions of labour legislation.

When Pavel Pavlovich and Yakov Ivanovich got together, they had invariably plunged into a rather unusual sort of contest, that they never seemed to weary of.

"Yakov Ivanovich," Pavel Pavlovich might call through the open door of his study, while his friend was still getting out of his overcoat in the hallway, "could you by any chance tell me the colour of the edging on the coat cuffs in Her Majesty's Regiment of the Guard Cuirassiers?"

"A simple question, Pavel Pavlovich," Yakov Ivanovich would answer, appearing in the doorway, with a friendly nod for me. "Light blue, of course, as everybody knows. But perhaps you might inform me, my dear Pavel Pavlo-



vich, what colour dolmans were worn in the Pavlograd Hussars, where Nikolai Rostov served."

"Green," Pavel Pavlovich would shoot back. "And what about the plumes in the Finland Regiment of the Guards?"

"Black."

"Well, then, my dear Yakov Ivanovich, and can you tell me in what year the Lithuanian Regiment of the Guards was formed?"

"1811, if my memory doesn't deceive me."

"And in what battles did it participate?"

"Borodino, Bautzen, Dresden, Kulm, Leipzig. I name only those battles in which the regiment distinguished itself. Yes, and, of course, it was one of the first to enter Paris."

"Yakov Ivanovich! There's not a living soul remembers all that but you! You're simply remarkable! Colossal!"

To be truthful, I could not share in Pavel Pavlovich's enthusiasm. I knew nothing of edgings, pouches, housings, and the like, nor was I particularly well informed on the details of army history. I would soon tire, and when I could no longer suppress my yawns, would take my leave.

Puzzling, now, over the problem of the portrait, I thought more and more often of Yakov Ivanovich and his unusual store of knowledge.

If Korin was right, I reflected—in other words,

1. If the thought of another uniform underneath must be dropped (in which he was right unquestionably); and

2. If it be assumed that, his uniform notwithstanding, the officer in the portrait was Lermontov—

Then it remained,

3. To investigate the uniform depicted in the portrait.

That was a question I was not competent to deal with. And so, to have a talk with Yakov Ivanovich, I made a special trip to Leningrad.

I explained my trouble to him by telephone, then hurried to his home.



"Yakov Ivanovich!" I cried, as I came in. "What regiment might an officer belong to in the nineteenth century if he wore red edging on his collar?"

"Red edging! How you laymen talk!" Yakov Ivanovich returned impatiently. "There was always a remarkable wealth of shades and colours in Russian military uniform. What shade of red have you in mind?"

"This," I said, producing a slip of paper on which I had had the colour copied for me.

"That was never red, and never will be," he said crisply. "It's crimson, of course—the shade that was used, if I remember correctly, in the Guard Sharp-Shooters, the 17th Novomirgorod Uhlans, the 16th Tver Dragoons, and the Grodno Hussars. I'll look them up, to make sure."

He went to a bookcase and got out piles of material: lists of uniforms, regimental histories, coloured prints.

"So far, so good," he declared, after a swift check. "Now for the other details. If the epaulette in your portrait is the cavalry type, that eliminates the Sharp-Shooters, leaving us the Tver Dragoons, the Novomirgorod Uhlans, and the Grodno Hussars. But the Tver Dragoons and the Novomirgorod Uhlans wore gilt buttons and epaulettes, whereas in your portrait the epaulette is silver. That leaves only the Grodno Hussars. What about the rest of the uniform?"

I showed him the photograph.

"What an innocent you are!" he exclaimed. "Why, this is a cavalry coat of the eighteen thirties. There were changes in the Grodno Regiment at that period—a shift to blue edgings on the dolman, for one thing. But the olive-green coat was retained until 1845, and until 1838 the edgings on the coat were crimson. You can see that for yourself, if you look through the drawings that were made in colour for Nicholas I. So that the evidence is all in favour of the Grodno Regiment."



He began putting his books in order.

"Yakov Ivanovich!" I cried. "You can't even imagine the importance of what you say! Why, all that being so, this is clearly Lermontov!"

"I'm sorry," Yakov Ivanovich returned, "but that I cannot tell. All we know so far is that it's an officer of the Grodno Hussars. Whether it's Lermontov or not, is not for me to say."

### METHODS OF IDENTIFICATION

An officer of the Grodno Hussars! That narrowed the possibilities to some thirty or forty people—the number of officers in that regiment in the eighteen thirties.

The goal seemed very near. But—how to attain it, I could not imagine.

I returned to Moscow. And again I spent my evenings puzzling over the photograph—staring at it, at times, as though I thought it might tell me something, if only I looked hard enough. Yes, that would have been wonderful—for the portrait to say itself whom it represented.

And then I thought of something else: the identification, not of portraits, but of living people, in cases when they themselves could not, or would not, say who they were. What was done then? Clearly, other people must be asked to identify them.

But suppose there was no one who knew them, or at any rate who would admit he knew them?

They might, of course, be identified by photograph. But suppose there were no photographs? Could a portrait by a painter possibly serve this end?

Again I borrowed the portrait and took it to the Criminal Laboratory.

"Ah," the staff greeted me. "Here again?"

"Here again. What I want to know is—how can a person be identified, in criminal investigations, if there are no photographs of him available.



"In such cases we use the method of verbal portrait."

"And what is that?"

"Oh, that's simple enough."

In questions of identification, the science of criminal investigation discards such descriptions as: thin, stout, ruddy-complexioned, clean-shaven, grey-haired, and the like.

Today a man's cheeks may be ruddy, and tomorrow pale. He may be clean-shaven today, and bearded before a month has passed. His hair may be grey in the morning, but dyed any colour he chooses by the afternoon.

Investigators, therefore, take into account only stable, basic traits—those which cannot be changed either by time, or by circumstances, or by deliberate intent: such traits as height, body structure, and—of the face and profile—the shape and dimensions of forehead, nose, ears, lips, and chin, the shape and position of the eyes, the colour of the iris, etc. Descriptions, or verbal portraits, based on such data are always dependable, for, like fingerprints, no two persons' stable traits ever coincide completely.

"But why should all this interest you?" the Laboratory people asked.

"Well, you see," I explained, "I've cleared up the uniform problem. That's all straightened out. And now I wonder whether you couldn't help me to establish finally whether or not the officer in the portrait is Lermontov."

"Look here," they said, "why don't you have a talk with Sergei Mikhailovich? He might agree to try. And if he does, your problem will be settled once and for all."

"But who is Sergei Mikhailovich?"

"Professor Potapov, of course. Do you mean to say you've never heard of him? Why, he's known internationally for his work in criminology. One of the founders of the science in our country. An expert in forensic photography. Creator of the study of handwriting as a science. Our greatest authority in the field of identification. He



has a passion for difficult, muddled problems, and your portrait certainly ought to interest him."

They led me down the hall to Professor Potapov's office.

He was writing at his desk—an elderly man, with a tiny grey beard and grey hair combed straight back from his forehead. A tranquil, clever face, and swift, penetrating hazel eyes.

I was introduced, and explained my problem. He heard me out attentively, questioned me in some detail, and examined the portrait with great care.

"Very well," he said finally. "We'll see what we can do by the verbal portrait theory of identity. I shall have to ask you to trust us with this portrait, and to send us reproductions of all other Lermontov portraits known to be authentic. Yes, and to wait patiently for about a month."

I thanked him, and we left his office.

"What is he planning to do?" I asked my guides.

"He intends to apply the theory of identity based on the verbal portrait," they explained. "If you take two different photographs of the same person, and bring them to scale so that the distance between two chosen stable points on the face corresponds, then, when you lay one photograph on the other, all the stable points will coincide. If the photographs are not of the same person, the points will not all coincide, for, as research has proved, for different persons they do not and cannot all coincide. Photographs are often compared in this way, but for paintings this will be a first attempt."

We shook hands, and I prepared to leave.

"Your worries are over now," they said in parting. "Once Sergei Mikhailovich has taken it up, you'll get your answer next month, as he promised, and it will be definite: Lermontov, or no."



## PROFESSOR POTAPOV'S CONCLUSION

A month passed.

The day came when a messenger brought a packet and an envelope, both addressed to me.

I tore open the envelope. It contained a typewritten document headed, "Conclusion by Professor S. M. Potapov."

I did not yet know my fate. But it was signed and sealed, and here it lay before me. With beating heart, I began to read.

"With the idea in mind of an attempt to solve the problem set before me by comparing the facial characteristics of the given portrait ... with those of other Lermontov portraits, of unquestioned authenticity, I examined reproductions of several such portraits...."

Of the reproductions I sent him, Professor Potapov selected that of a miniature done by Zabolotsky in 1840, in which Lermontov's head is poised at the same angle as in the Vulfert portrait. To compare the miniature and the portrait, he first had them brought to scale: in other words, so photographed as to equalize the distance between two definite stable points in both. As his stable points, he chose the bottom of the ear lobe and the corner of the right eye. Then he had these photographs transferred to lantern slides.

"Superimposing one slide on the other, and holding them up against the light...."

The slides—they must be in the packet! Impatiently, I snapped the cord and opened the cardboard box. Inside lay two dark glass plates.

I took them out and held them up to the light. One was the Zabolotsky miniature, enlarged; the other, the Vulfert portrait, diminished. Slowly, methodically, I brought them together: united the ear lobes; united the corners of the eyes. And—a miracle took place! Both portraits disappeared, melted before my eyes—merged in a new, third





А. Беру «вульффертовский» портрет...

*Vulfert portrait...*



Б. Накладываю на него портрет  
Заболоцкого...

*Miniature done by Zabolotsky in 1840.*





А. Б. Совмещение обоих портретов:  
Лермонтов — самый похожий!

*Superimposing one slide on the other.*



portrait. Everything coincided—eyes, eyebrows, nose, lips, chin! Only the hair was differently combed, and the cheek in the Vulfert portrait was a little fuller than in the miniature. But neither hairdress nor roundness of cheek, after all, can be considered a stable trait! And, turning back to Professor Potapov's statement, I knew now what I would find:

"...I must express the opinion that the portrait in oils submitted by Com. Andronikov is a portrait of M. Y. Lermontov."

What an amazing achievement! An authority in the study of crime, not of art or literature—and how splendidly his method had helped in the identification of a poet portrayed by an artist a century ago!

Professor Potapov had feared that the painters might have been inexact in rendering the proportions of the face. Were these distorted, his tests could not succeed. But his fears had been unfounded.

Thrilling with happy excitement, I turned again to that wonderful merging of two different portraits into the one living face. How the eyes had changed! The absent, musing gaze of the Vulfert portrait was now focussed and intent. It seemed to be turned straight on me. How fortunate that both painters had so truly grasped not only the appearance and expression of their great contemporary, but the relative proportions of his features!

Once more I read through Professor Potapov's conclusion. It was an exhaustive reply to the question I had set, refuting authoritatively all doubt as to the portrait's identity.

It had not been a matter of pure chance—this final success. People of many professions had joined, first in the search for the portrait, and then in the quest for proof of its identity: the staffs of two literary museums; an Army man—Lieutenant-Colonel of the Engineers Vulfert; a railway school student—Kolya Sloyev; an artist—Korin; Professor Potapov and his staff of crime researchers;



librarians, photographers, X-ray operators. Even if Yakov Ivanovich had been unable to help me with the problem of the uniform, Professor Potapov would have recognized the officer of the portrait as Lermontov, and presented incontrovertible proof of his identity.

Only now—the search completed, the proof attained—did I realize how deeply I had come to love this portrait, and how infinitely difficult it would have been for me to accustom myself to the idea that it was not Lermontov. Many and many a line of Lermontov's verse, many a fancy of my own creation concerning the poet and his life, are bound up inseparably, for me, with this inspiring portrait of him.

Let me describe it, then, in parting, in Lermontov's own words:

*Behold the likeness: with a careless line,  
As if an echo of a thought divine  
The artist has portrayed him. The face  
Is not quite dead, nor really living.*

*Translated by Helen Altschuler*



